



# DALE KOOYENGA

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 14<sup>th</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

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P.O. Box 8952  
Madison, WI 53708-8952

Chairman and members of the committee,

I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the Safe Families bill. Although the bill has been named after the Safe Families organization, this bipartisan bill is a simple change to our laws surrounding power of attorney for minors in the State of Wisconsin.

In the State of Wisconsin parents do not have the right to grant power of attorney to other parents. This constraint makes criminals out of well intentioned parents, and prevents organizations like Safe Families from operating in the State of Wisconsin.

Let's take this example. If a mother has a drug problem and the police knock down her door, find drugs and arrest her, she is sent to jail and her children are enrolled in the foster care program. However, if a mother raises her hand and ask for someone to watch her children while she voluntarily attends a drug treatment center, she would be unable to utilize the foster care program. This bill will allow parents across our state, that suffer from domestic abuse, drug, alcohol abuse, or other issues, to seek assistance while other responsible parents look after the children.

The bill also allows family's flexibility to deal with other life events that may require power of attorney to be transferred to other parents. For example, if both spouses are in the military reserves and called to duty at the same time, this bill will allow the parents to sign power of attorney to another set of parents to act on their behalf during the course of their deployment.

The fiscal estimate to this bill reflects zero cost and zero savings. However, the state will indirectly save money by relieving the state and local governments of children that would otherwise be enrolled in the foster care program.

This bill will create jobs. The Safe Families organization has been operating with success in other states. They are posed to hire professionals to assist in facilitating their mission here in Wisconsin.

Most importantly, this bill will save and change lives. There is nothing more important to our community than our children.

I want to thank Tracie Weldie and the entire Safe Families organization, the Wisconsin Bar Association, the Department of Children and Families, fellow legislators and their staff, for their work on this bill. You will hear additional testimony from these dedicated professionals.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am open to questions at this time.

Dale Kooyenga

A handwritten signature of Dale Kooyenga in black ink, written in a cursive style.

State Representative  
14<sup>th</sup> Assembly District

TESTIMONY ON ASSEMBLY BILL 30  
Fred Ellen Bove, Administrator, Division of Safety and Permanence  
Department of Children and Families  
April 6, 2011

Good morning, Mr. Chair, Mr. Vice-Chair, and members of the Committee. My name is Fred Ellen Bove, and I am the administrator for the Division of Safety and Permanence for the Department of Children and Families. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on Assembly Bill 30 which has the potential to impact many children and families in the state of Wisconsin. I am testifying for informational purposes.

The core provision of this bill is to enable a parent who has legal custody of a child to delegate to another person the parent's powers regarding the care and custody of the child.

There are many circumstances under which a parent may want, or need, to transfer temporarily care and custody of a child to a friend or other member of the community. For example, the parent may be facing challenges caring for the child due to the child's behavior or due to family stress related to external factors such as a parent's job loss; the parent may be assigned to military duty or business responsibilities overseas; or the parent may be undergoing prolonged medical treatment that requires the parent to be in a medical facility and/or render the parent physically unable to carry out daily child-caring duties.

Assembly Bill 30 creates a mechanism by which parents can delegate the powers of care and custody to a close friend or other member of the community in circumstances, such as those noted above, when the parent needs or wants assistance in caring for a child. Under the bill, a parent would be able to transfer care and custody of a child to a close friend or other member of the community through a properly executed power of attorney, without court involvement, as currently required.

Similar to the many other decisions that parents make for their children, the decision to delegate care and custody on a temporary basis to another individual is a parental decision that does not require or involve the approval, review or ongoing monitoring by the Department of Children and Families or other governmental body.

In many cases, a parent will make a custody arrangement, as permitted under the bill, with a friend or community member with whom the parent has a close and long-standing relationship. In these cases, the parent is familiar with the background and values of the potential host parent and is able to determine if the person is a trustworthy, capable, and appropriate guardian for the parent's child.

In other cases, an individual may not have relatives or close friends in the community, and may seek the help of an organization, such as a church or other organization, in identifying an individual who is willing and capable of serving as a host parent and providing custody to the parent's child. In these cases the parent may have no direct knowledge of the potential host parent on which to base a judgment as to whether the host parent is a safe and suitable setting for

the child. These situations, where an organization facilitates a match between a parent in need and a potential host parent, are also permitted and expected to arise under the bill.

As part of the Department's commitment to protect the safety of children, the Department views that it is important to include the following safeguards, which are incorporated in the Assembly Substitute Amendment. These key safeguards include:

- The requirement that if an organization is involved in arranging a host parent, the organization must conduct background checks of any potential individual who may serve as a host parent and be delegated care and custody of children under the law and the other residents of the host parent's household. The organization is prohibited from arranging individuals with certain criminal records or child abuse or neglect substantiations to serve as host parents.
- The expansion of confidentiality laws to allow the Department to release child abuse and neglect background information to an organization that is conducting background checks on potential host families to enable the organization to conduct background checks on the individuals who may be taking care and custody of children or residing with them.
- The requirement that only a parent with legal custody can transfer care and custody under the new law. This will prevent a non-custodial parent from unilaterally transferring placement from the custodial parent.

It is important to note that all current child protective services safeguards continue to apply to children residing with individuals who have been delegated care and custody. The Department or county of responsibility will promptly initiate an investigation and appropriate follow-up actions of any report of suspected abuse or neglect of a child residing with a delegated individual, as is currently done for any child in the community.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Committee.



Children's Hospital  
and Health System™

PO Box 1997  
Milwaukee, WI 53201-1997  
Phone (414) 266-2000  
[www.chw.org](http://www.chw.org)

TO: Members of the Assembly Committee on Children & Families  
FROM: Michelle Mettner, Vice President Government Relations & Advocacy  
Children's Hospital & Health System  
DATE: April 6, 2011  
RE: Concerns with AB30

Members of the Committee thank you for the opportunity to share with you Children's Hospital & Health System's concerns with AB30.

Children's Hospital of Wisconsin is the only hospital in Wisconsin dedicated solely to the care and treatment of children and one of the nation's top pediatric facilities. Founded in 1894, Children's Hospital serves children with all types of illnesses, injuries, birth defects and other disorders. Care is provided to children from Wisconsin, Michigan, northern Illinois and beyond. Children's Hospital is a major teaching affiliate of the Medical College of Wisconsin and is affiliated with several schools of nursing.

The Child Protection Center, Prevent Child Abuse Wisconsin, Child Abuse Prevention Fund and Children's Service Society are all parts of Children's Hospital & Health System and all have concerns with this legislation.

As experts in the area of child abuse prevention, intervention and treatment, we are concerned that AB30 as currently written does not take into account significant safeguards that protect children from being abused by those assigned to care for them. Child abuse occurs in many settings and with many different types of people. But the one statistic that is undeniable is that **95%<sup>1</sup>** of substantiated child abuse occurs most often with adults and older youth that the child knows and has a relationship with: parent, primary care giver, relative, friend of the family, sibling, live-in boy friend. These cases of abuse occur now when parents are already making decisions about who has unrestricted access to their children. These are the cases we *know* about.

Children's best interests must be taken into consideration when their parent is experiencing such stress as to have their care-taking transferred to another adult. To assure the child's safety is a priority, adults assuming responsibility for the child need to be screened using benchmarks that are similar to what occurs when a child is placed by the courts in foster care or a relative placement. While the foster care system may not be the optimum system in which to carry out this specific function, we are concerned that with no rigorous screening or assessment in place children will be placed in harm's way and may end up as a case in the child welfare system. We urge you to consider the unintended consequences of not placing the children's safety and welfare as first priority.

Respectfully, we urge you to consider amending to place screening and assessment safeguards as part of this legislation to keep children in homes where they can be nurtured and thrive while their parents take care of whatever problems have driven them to temporarily transfer custody to someone else.

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<sup>1</sup> **Wisconsin Child Abuse and Neglect Report: Annual Report for Calendar Year 2009 to the Governor and Legislature.**  
Wisconsin Department of Children and Families. <http://dcf.wi.gov/children/CPS/PDF/2009CANReport.pdf>



# Information Packet: Safe Families for Children in Wisconsin

## What is Safe Families?

Safe Families is a non-profit community outreach program that connects families in crisis with volunteers from the local community. Safe Family volunteers serve families by opening their homes to children on a temporary basis, or by becoming a 'coach' to the custodial parent; all toward the purpose of assisting with a family's stabilization.

## History

Founded in 2002 by LYDIA Home Association, a Chicago-based Christian child welfare agency, Safe Families for Children has 18 local programs across the US, in 15 different states. The Greater-Madison and Milwaukee Areas have established competent Advisory Boards and many volunteers to launch and implement this program in Wisconsin.

## The Law

Current Wisconsin law prevents a parent from having anyone other than a blood relative provide overnight care for their children. The law should be changed to give parents the right to delegate the care and custody of their child by a properly executed power of attorney. **The law in Wisconsin must be changed before parents can responsibly exercise the decision to place their children through the Safe Families program.**

## Objectives of the Safe Families Program:

- Biological Parents maintain full custody during a child placement with Safe Families;
- Volunteer families are extensively screened, trained, monitored and supported;
- Close working relationships between Safe Families and the referring organization are maintained;
- Volunteers are trained and supervised by a trained and experienced social worker;
- Commitment to reunite the family as soon as possible.

## Goals and Benefits of Implementing the Safe Families Program:

- **Child Welfare Deflection:** Provides a safe alternative to child welfare custody, thus significantly reducing the number of children entering the Wisconsin state child welfare system;
- **Child Abuse Prevention:** By offering support; the goal is to avert potential abuse/neglect episodes;
- **Family Support and Stabilization:** Many Safe Families Volunteers become the extended family that a struggling family never had;
- **Savings to the state and counties:** Direct Cost savings estimated between \$5 – \$25 million dollars per year;
- **Strengthening families who are hurting:** Provides faith and community groups as a way to reach out to others.

## Recognitions Received:

- 2010-- Peter F. Drucker Award for Nonprofit Innovation.
- 2007-- Most Outstanding Child Abuse and Prevention Program in Northern Illinois.

**National Program Featured on:** CBS Evening News, CNN, *The New York Times* and many others.

**Website:** [www.safe-families.org](http://www.safe-families.org)

**Contact details:** Milwaukee: Traci Weldie (414) 374-3490 email: [milwaukee@safe-families.org](mailto:milwaukee@safe-families.org)  
Greater-Madison Area : Harold Tack (608) 658-5317 email: [safefamilies.gma@gmail.com](mailto:safefamilies.gma@gmail.com)

## **Safe Families for Children Metrics** **Updated through December 2010**



- ▶ 18 Sites Nationally Representing 15 states
- ▶ 21 Additional Sites in Development
- ▶ 26 Sites in the Beginning Stages of Interest
- ▶ 71% of the children we serve are 5 years or younger

### **Accumulated Statistics Since Inception (2003 through December 2010):**

	<b><u>National</u></b>	<b><u>Chicago</u></b>
No. of placements of children:	3,624	2,574
No. of children served:	2,181	1,499
Mean length of stay:	39.80 days	44.56 days
Median length of stay:	14.0 days	16.0 days
Mean age:	4.75 years	4.49 years
Median age:	3.07 years	2.87 years
Actual days of service provided:	144,230	114,686

### **Annual Statistics:**

<b><u>National:</u></b>	<b><u>2010</u></b>	<b><u>2009</u></b>	<b><u>2008</u></b>
No. of placements of children:	1,532	1,061	456
No. of children served:	1,001	702	316
Actual days of service:	47,534	44,087	17,771
Number of unique families that served by taking in a child:	575	370	186

<b><u>Chicago:</u></b>	<b><u>2010</u></b>	<b><u>2009</u></b>	<b><u>2008</u></b>
No. of placements of children:	905	693	405
No. of children served:	556	468	273
Actual days of service provided:	30,201	34,342	16,267
Number of unique families that served by taking in a child:	331	263	163

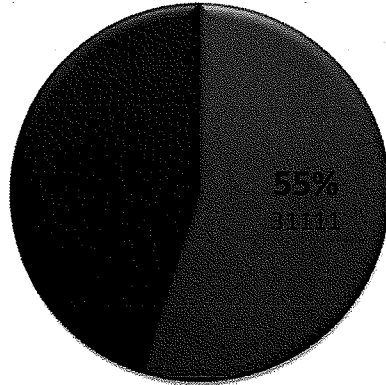
### **Outcomes (where children go after placement in Safe Families):**

	<b><i>National</i></b>	<b><i>Chicago</i></b>
Returned to parent / guardian	84.54%	83.39%
Placed with relative / friend	5.26%	5.49%
DCFS	4.36%	5.34%
Transferred into another program	2.44%	2.02%
Long-term guardian	1.99%	2.36%
DCFS but remain with Safe Family	0.76%	0.72%
Youth in college	0.14%	0.14%
Run (child runs away)	0.52%	0.53%

# WI CPS Statistics: 2009

## WI CPS Reports w/Maltreatment: 2009

Total: 56,619



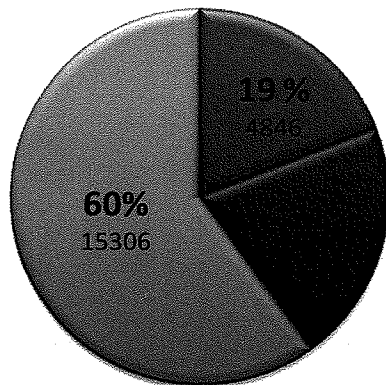
■ Screen-out

■ Screen-in / Investigated

(i) Potential Safe Families referrals: **31,111**

## WI CPS Screen-in/Investigated: 2009

Total 25,508



■ Investigated / Service by CPS

■ Investigated / Refer to  
Community Service

■ Ultimately Screen-out

(ii) Potential Safe Families referrals: **15,306**

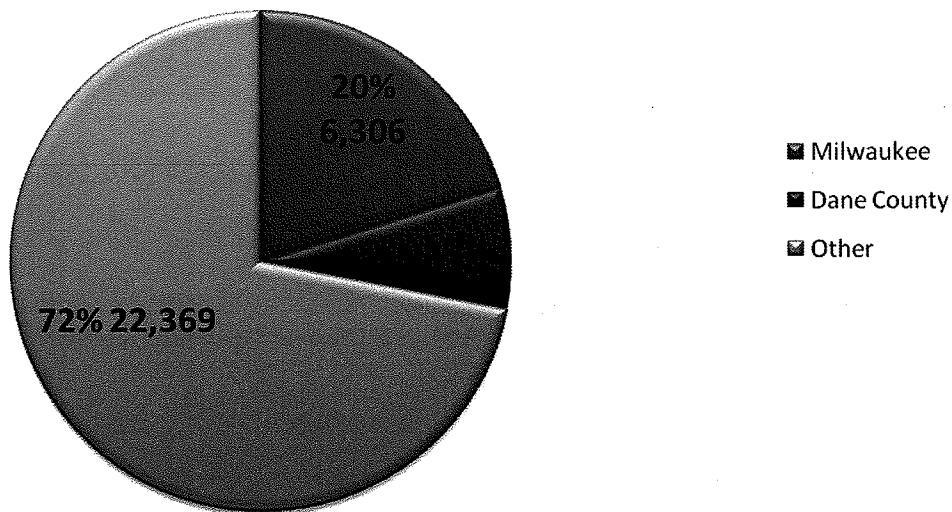
**Total** (i and ii) potential referrals for 2009: **46,417**

[www.safe-families.org](http://www.safe-families.org)



# Milwaukee and Dane County CPS Statistics: 2009

## Milwaukee and Dane County CPS Screen-out for 2009 Total: 8,741



***Potential Safe Families referrals in Milwaukee and Dane counties for 2009: 8,741***

### Reference:

Bureau of Program Integrity, Division of Safety and Permanence, Wisconsin Department of Children and Families. (2009). **WI Child Abuse and Neglect Report.**

<http://www.dcf.wisconsin.gov/cwreview/reports/CAN.htm>.

[www.safe-families.org](http://www.safe-families.org)





Public hearing before the **Children and Families Assembly Committee**,  
Wednesday, April 6<sup>th</sup> @ 10 am Capital Building, Madison: Room 415 Northwest

Re: Testimony in favor of **Assembly Bill 30**

Good morning, Mr. Chairman and sub-committee members.

My name is Jennifer Brady and I am a 29 year old mother of a 1 1/2 year old daughter presently in a Safe Family placement in Rockford, IL. I would like to briefly share about my life prior to this placement and how my life has changed in these past 60 days.

Growing-up with a mother who is a marijuana and cocaine addict and a father who is an alcoholic, I thought that substance abuse was 'in my blood' and starting using at age 13. At age 19, I began <sup>using prescription drugs daily</sup> a daily prescription drug use and began a journey for these last 10 years that has ruined my whole life... losing my family and friends; all possessions; becoming jobless...until I lost everything. Then three years ago, I became depressed and tried to commit suicide. Six months ago, I finally left my parents home after my father went to jail; convicted of domestic battery for physically abusing me in front of my two children. I needed to leave their home, but this resulted in a lifestyle of homelessness and living on the streets.

A few months ago, a friend convinced me to go into a Detox unit; a first time experience for me. I had actually planned to start using as soon as I was released. For the first time I was forced to confront my 'demons', realizing that I could not ever return back to live with my parents. Life was becoming too self-destructive. Upon leaving Detox, I became aware of a recovery housing program that required 30-days of sobriety before one could be admitted. Unable to obtain any community housing due to unpaid utility bills, I was left without any options until someone provided me with some information about Safe Families. That next day I was welcomed into a Safe Family home with my daughter Mariah where I remained for about 6 weeks until I was accepted into the recovery housing program a few weeks ago...my daughter will remain with the safe family until she will be able to move in with me; hopefully in the next 1-2 months.

So what has this all meant to me, besides being clean and sober for the first time in 10 years? This has been an amazing and wonderful experience. Living with people who really care about me and my daughter has opened my eyes to a lot of new things that I never was aware of growing-up...like living in a safe environment. I can't believe the number of volunteers involved with Safe Families who have helped me with transportation to get to meetings and appointments, stepped-in to assist with childcare, and who have met with me <sup>as</sup> in a team to be supportive and encouraging in this new transition. They are like a new family to me and my daughter loves them to death. I am beyond grateful. I don't have to be scared anymore about the chance of losing my

children to foster care because of my neglectful lifestyle. Yes, in looking back, these have been the worst 10 years of my life. But I have this confidence that my life has really changed and I have no doubt that I will be 'giving back' as a safe family myself someday.

I wish to lend my support towards the passage of the Assembly Bill 30 and hope that this action will help other parents like myself connect their children with a safe and nurturing home in their community. Thank you for listening to my testimony.

Respectfully submitted by,

Ms. Jennifer Brady

C.C. Representative Pridemore (Chair),

Representative Krug (Vice-Chair),

Representative Kestell,

Representative Williams,

Representative Thiesfeldt,

Representative Berceau,

Representative Seidel ,

Representative Pope-Roberts.

## CHILDREN & THE LAW SECTION

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Date: April 6, 2011

TO: Members, Assembly Children & Families Committee

FR: Attorney Theresa L. Roetter  
Children & the Law Section

RE: AB 30 – POA transfer of custody

The Children & the Law Section (CLS) of the State Bar of Wisconsin is comprised of attorneys who have a special interest in laws that affect children. Section members include judges, court commissioners, prosecutors, guardians ad litem, agency attorneys and private practice attorneys who represent various parties including children, parents, and grandparents as well as agencies that serve children. We share your interest in finding solutions to protect the best interests of children.

**The Section supports creating a power of attorney (POA) which will allow parents to grant another adult permission to have placement of and make decisions for their minor child.**

CLS has been working for several years on a comprehensive re-write of the juvenile guardianship statutes. 2009 SB 706 was introduced on the last day of the 2009-10 legislative session in order to disseminate the Section's work on guardianship reform in a public forum for others to review and contemplate. The original language for AB 30 was the language our Section suggested in 2009 SB 706.

In the year since 2009 SB 706 has been public, the Section received feedback and suggested improvements for the power of attorney provisions from many sources. The Section believes these improvements strengthen the original draft language. We shared the suggested changes with Representative Kooyenga and are pleased that he incorporated these suggestions in the Assembly Substitute Amendment 1 (LRB s0088/2).

Assembly Bill 30 seeks to create a power of attorney (POA) which will allow parents to grant another adult permission to have placement of and make decisions for their minor child. Under current law, if a parent wants their child to reside with another responsible adult for a period of time longer than thirty days, petitioning the court for a formal guardianship is the only legal option which will allow the other adult to enroll the child in school, seek medical care and provide health insurance.

Children often reside with other adults for a limited period of time. Some of the many reasons include situations where the custodial parent is unavailable due to the parent's active military duty, medical treatment for the parent, jail/prison sentence, substance abuse, mental health treatment, or if the child's educational needs or desire for intensive sports training demand a different living arrangement. A power of attorney such as the one contemplated by AB 30 will



STATE BAR OF WISCONSIN

allow a parent to make plans for their child's care without the expense and delay of court proceedings and will *decrease* the number of guardianships thereby reducing court congestion.

We strongly support the language in the amendment which clarifies that executing a POA would not prevent or obstruct:

- (a) A child abuse or neglect investigation under Wis. Stat. § 48.981 from proceeding;
- (b) An intake inquiry under Wis. Stat. § 48.24 from being completed;
- (c) A child being taken into protective custody under Wis. Stat. §§ 48.19-48.21; and
- (d) A court from assuming jurisdiction under Wis. Stat. § 48.13.

The Section also supports the amendment's provisions for a uniform format which will be easily recognized by medical and educational providers, provisions which provide that background checks be conducted in appropriate situations and provisions which include the permissive reporting of child abuse and/or neglect. The amendment which limits the power to grant a POA to a legal custodian is also essential to prevent a non-custodial parent from unilaterally transferring the child's placement from the custodial parent's care.

The proposed amendment language will not infringe on the custodial parent's authority to make decisions for their child. These provisions will, instead, provide protection for the child who might otherwise be abused or exploited by a parent or other individual who would use a POA to prevent authorities from intervening in abuse or neglect situations (i.e. such circumstances might include trafficking of children for sexual abuse or illegal adoptions, child pornography and other forms of child exploitation). The language will allow a child protective services agency to intervene in those circumstances where child abuse or neglect referrals have been made but would not trigger agency involvement in non abuse or neglect circumstances.

Thank you for your interest in issues which our Section members believe are important to children and families. We urge you to support Assembly Bill 30 as amended by ASA 1.

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*The State Bar of Wisconsin establishes and maintains sections for carrying on the work of the association, each within its proper field of study defined in its bylaws. Each section consists of members who voluntarily enroll in the section because of a special interest in the particular field of law to which the section is dedicated. Section positions are taken on behalf of the section only.*

*The views expressed on this issue have not been approved by the Board of Governors of the State Bar of Wisconsin and are not the views of the State Bar as a whole. These views are those of the Section alone.*

*If you have questions about this memorandum, please contact Sandy Lonergan, Government Relations Coordinator, at [slonergan@wisbar.org](mailto:slonergan@wisbar.org) or (608) 250-6045.*

April 6, 2011

To Chairman Pridemore and Committee Members,

My name is Mike Murphy. I am a Pastor at Elmbrook Church in Brookfield, WI. Elmbrook Church is a non-denominational church with an average weekend attendance of 6,000. As the Pastor with the specific responsibility for Community Engagement, I engage regularly with agencies, ministries and individuals in Waukesha and Milwaukee counties that provide services in the community. Yet, I still see gaps between those needing help and those wanting to help. Consequently, we are deeply committed to helping not just those within our membership but those in the community that often lack hope and simply need someone to come alongside them. As a faith community, we have learned that what we can offer those in the midst of a family crisis is our time, our presence and our commitment to be there for the long haul.

Elmbrook Church considers it a privilege today to offer our support and encouragement for the passage of AB-30. We believe in this legislation because it expands the options for serving vulnerable children and families that face difficult circumstances by allowing a caring parent the opportunity to choose a short term guardian for their child.

As a church, we are especially supportive of AB30 because we believe it will open up a new avenue for the members of our congregation to reach out and serve families in times of crisis within our own neighborhoods and cities. Currently, we have thousands that are serving locally. However, we also have thousands more who are looking for opportunities to connect to a person, practically and tangibly. We see a deep desire within our faith community to help in direct ways and AB-30 will allow us to connect those in need with those ready to serve.

One may ask, "Why don't we just encourage our congregation to serve as foster parents?"

First, we have members that currently serve as foster parents and we affirm their commitment to this high calling. However, we believe AB-30 will create an opportunity for more families within our church to serve; whether to host a child or be a part of the support system for the host family within our church.

Second, we welcome the opportunity for those in our church to come alongside not just the children but the parents who have asked for help. Part of our responsibility as a local church is to invest in the lives of those in crisis. Many times the issues that lead to a parent desiring to place their child with a trusted family is complicated and is not easily addressed with quick fixes. However, as a church community committed to strengthening families and communities, we encourage our members to invest

ELMBROOK

ELMBROOK CHURCH

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their time by coming alongside, as a friend and ultimately as extended family, to help someone in need, expecting nothing in return. Our desire is to provide a network of care so that families in crisis in our neighborhoods and cities have somewhere and someone to look to for support.

We want to encourage you and others to support AB30 as it has the potential to unleash thousands within our churches to connect with those who need hope and simply do not know where to turn. This hope can be practically manifested by connecting caring and competent people with those in need, in a dignified way, with the common goal of restoring families and strengthening our communities.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mike Murphy". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Mike" and last name "Murphy" clearly distinguishable.

Mike Murphy  
Associate Pastor  
Community Engagement  
Elmbrook Church  
Brookfield, WI

TESTISMONY IN FAVOR  
SAFE FAMILIES FOR CHILDREN  
REVEREND SUSAN B VERGERONT

Mr. chairmen and committee members, My name is Susan Vergeront and I thank you for this opportunity to speak to you on this bill

I serve as an advisor to the Safe Families program in Dane County and I am one of the Associate Pastors at First Presbyterian Church in Waunakee, where the effort to get Safe Families in Wisconsin underway first began.

I also served in the state assembly from 1985-1994 representing the 60<sup>th</sup> Assembly district, in Ozaukee County.

I am speaking both as a former legislator who worked closely with welfare and prevention programs in the 80's and early 90's and as a pastor who has seen first hand the need for such a program.

As a legislator I chaired the Governors' Task Force on Families and children, where we took a look at the efficiency of prevention programs that work to help families stay together. Not only are they very cost effective in the long run in using tax dollars but they are also a way to strengthen families and the fabric of our society.

As a pastor, I know there is a deep longing on the part of many to do more than just give money. Many folks want to work hand in hand to help others in crisis. This is true not only in churches, but in the community in general.

Safe families provides a wonderful opportunity for this to happen. It not only will not cost the state money, but it will save tax dollars... AND work to keep families together and strong.

This simple law change is all that is needed. It will have the built in safeguards – mandating strict background checks for all homes that become involved in helping a parent voluntarily place their child, and it will decriminalize parents who allow their children to stay overnight at a friends home.

Thank you for your time.

Reverend Susan Vergeront  
First Presbyterian Church Waunakee  
608 577 7086

March 24, 2011

Assembly Committee on Children and Families  
Support of AB-30 Safe Families Bill

To Whom It May Concern:

The single biggest factor influencing the lives and outcomes of children is their family. Many at-risk families have good intentions but lack the family support needed to assist them in times of need.

By law and policy, Wisconsin State child welfare agencies are allowed only to remove children from their homes when they have suffered blatant abuse or neglect. With the changing economy, many more families are experiencing home foreclosure, financial crisis, unemployment and homelessness.

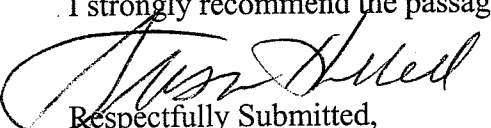
Safe Families for children is a network of host families and mentors that extends the community safety net by providing parents by their own request or recommendation a loving family to come alongside them during the crisis. Host families, prompted solely by compassion, are called to care for the children AND families through the difficult times. Host families are not compensated but view this as their ministry and doing God's work. It takes a village to raise a child.

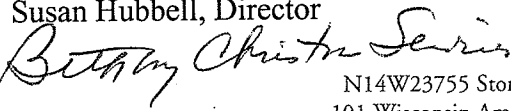
The goals of Safe Families movement are clear: To provide Child welfare deflection, child abuse prevention, and family support and stabilization. It is not a program- but rather a movement of Christians looking at our current Child Welfare System and wanting to help make a difference in the lives of families.

Bethany Christian Services of Wisconsin is a Licensed Child Placement Agency that would support this movement and we hope to increase our involvement should this law be passed and should private funds or foundations allow us to assist this program in partnership.

This movement is developed in Georgia, Tennessee, Minneapolis, Chicago and Florida – in many states Bethany Christian Services has a primary role in others a supportive role. By averting Child Welfare costs to taxpayers and to the children and families it is charged with serving is huge.

I strongly recommend the passage of this bill.

  
Respectfully Submitted,  
Susan Hubbell, Director



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2508 S 8th St • Sheboygan, WI 53081 • T: 920.923.6577 • F: 920.923.3001  
6031 W National Ave • West Allis, WI 53214 • T: 414.258.6640 • F: 414.258.6747



March 25, 2011

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Mark Mallwitz, and I am President of BASICS in Milwaukee, which is a Christian Ministry that has been serving in Milwaukee for over 15 years. BASICS has been working directly with families in need during these 15 years, and many of these families are those in real need.

Because of the great economic downturn in Milwaukee, many caring, conscientious families are struggling to care for their children. Many of these families, however, have done nothing to warrant getting the Bureau of Child Welfare involved. And because of the parents great fears and distrust for the current system, they are very hesitant to ask for the help that they need so desperately.

Safe Families, in my opinion, would help provide that loving support and encouragement that many families need in Milwaukee, without the fear of losing their children. Safe Families would allow the families to retain their rights as being parents, and maintain the dignity of the family.

I definitely see the tremendous need and opportunity to be a great help to many families in the Milwaukee area, and would wholeheartedly endorse their efforts, and would encourage others who care about our families in Milwaukee to support them as well.

If you have any questions, please feel encouraged to contact me at 414-881-5631, or at shyplatypus@juno.com

Sincerely,

Mark Mallwitz  
President  
BASICS In Milwaukee, Inc.

To whom this may concern:

I am writing in support of the Safe Families Bill. I am a Foster Care provider in Jackson County. I have witnessed how the social services system is over worked and stretched to their limits to reach and help families in need. Safe Families can make such a huge impact on those families that just need someone to care. Safe Families would immensely reduce the workload for social workers in cases that do not involve abuse or neglect, thereby freeing up workers to concentrate on more severe cases. And the monetary savings to the county and state would be evident.

I see Safe Families as a common sense approach to solving problems in communities, with a "heart". It would give volunteers hands on ability to mentor and teach, so the family being helped would be able find solutions to problems and learn from them, all in a setting that shows someone cares for them. I see this as big step in pulling communities together with people that want to be there to help, because they care. This is the way our nation was founded, with people stepping up to help their neighbors in need.

In the current social services system, with not enough workers to go around, many of these less severe cases are put on the back burner. In many cases they would just put the children into a foster home. This just separates the family, adding more hurt to an already hurtful situation. Safe Families volunteers would be able to work with the whole family, and not segment them.

I just see this as a "no-brainer" for our state. Once we are able to pass this Bill to allow Safe Families to function, I fully intend to incorporate it in our area, starting with my church located in Eau Claire. I strongly encourage you to consider passage of the Safe Families Bill as soon as possible so we might get volunteers busy helping Wisconsin families.

Thank you and God bless you for your efforts.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Dubiel

N11630 Kaas Lane

Osseo, WI 54758

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing this letter in support of The Safe Families Bill.

Several years ago, my son's friends mother stopped by my house. With her, she had two pre-teen boys. She was going into a shelter to get away from an abusive relationship, but the shelter, due to it's nature, would not accept pre-teen boys. Here I was with 2 additional children, I had done it before, I could cope. The problem was, the kids came with literally the clothes on their backs. I was between pay checks and needed help. I was just looking for someplace I could get some underwear for these boys. Unfortunately, I was turned away at every corner because I was not a legal guardian.

One of the reasons 2 extra boys wasn't difficult for me was because every year, I babysat for my friends 2 boys while she went on vacation for a week. She always left me with food, money and keys to the house as well as enough clothes for the week. I was given permission to act as parent at the children's school, as well as a letter allowing me to make medical decisions. Luckily, I never had to test if either of these would be honored.

Our Health and Family Services division is already over worked. Most people, if possible, find their own solutions to who will watch their children. There are not enough foster families. Although I am often willing to help someone out, I have never gone through the foster family licensing process, nor do I have any desire to do so.

There is a lot of choice for women in Wisconsin regarding their children, they can choose the children's school, they can choose the children's doctor, they can choose to abort a child; it is ridiculous to me to know that they cannot choose to temporarily transfer parental rights to a person of their choice.

I have worked in homeless shelters, youth shelters and, most recently, at a pregnancy center. I have seen many people in crisis. I have seen people refuse help they needed for fear of having their children taken away. Gain back some trust in the government and allow parents to make a choice about who is making decisions for their children. Consider the amendments and additions to Chapter 48, pass the 2011 Assembly Bill 30.

Thank you,

Sandi Rae O'Brien

Care Net Pregnancy Center of Milwaukee

2917 N. Oakland Avenue

Milwaukee, WI 53211

(414) 962-2212

[www.umatter.org](http://www.umatter.org) - Client site

[www.umatter.bbnw.org](http://www.umatter.bbnw.org) - Partner/Supporter site

Grace



# Hope Street Ministry

2522 West Capitol Drive, Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53206 • 414.445.5404  
perry@hopestreetministry.org

March 24, 2011

To whom it may concern,

I am writing this letter in support of AB – 30, the Safe Families Bill that gives a parent the right to determine short term guardianship. I can think of no greater practical step to insure the well being of the nuclear as well as the extended family in Wisconsin, in particular Milwaukee, a city whose children are suffering, and needlessly so in some cases. There are men and women ready to stand in the gap and care for these children, and AB-30 would allow the healing process to begin for both the parents and the children. Often this kind of help, while desperately needed, is just too costly for the state to provide, but not so with AB-30 as all funding is privately raised and the only cost is your time and energy to sign this bill into law. Please steward the time and authority that has been entrusted and given to you as a legislator and support AB-30.

As the Executive Director of a 23 apartment building used as transitional housing for men and women who are struggling with addiction I am all too familiar with the ravages of dysfunctional home environments. I see its effect in nearly 100% of our residents, 20% of which come to us directly from prison. While I can't give clinical statistics, my gut and practical experience of trying to heal the broken lives and hearts here at Hope Street over the last 10 years tells me that both addiction and criminal behavior are directly linked to dysfunctional family environments. AB-30 would eliminate some of that dysfunction and therefore potentially decrease addiction and criminal behavior. PLEASE PASS THIS BILL!!

Respectfully Yours,

Perry L. Brown  
Executive Director, Hope Street Ministry  
Cell 262-470-3784

5 April, 2011

To: Representative Pridemore and Committee on Children and Families

Please consider all of the enormous benefits that Safe Families can present Wisconsin families in various times of need. I am a mother of four children, but also a social worker. When I first heard about Safe Families, I was ecstatic to learn that there was such a program already set in place! If you have children or grandchildren, please put yourself in some of these families' positions. You have children to care for and no reliable friends or family to count on in a dire time of need. What would you do? Who would you turn to? Safe Families is exactly what the name implies. It is a safe family for you to rely upon. I have worked in various areas of social work, including CPS, therapeutic foster care and residential treatment, so I can certainly attest to how a failed system is in need of help. There are many cases that will need serious mental health treatment, so this is not to pretend that Safe Families would eliminate these ever-growing needs. But setting up Safe Families is most certainly going to prevent many families from ever getting into these situations.

Safe Families has been proven in several other states to be an effective program. This is an ideal program that is based on community being what community should be, and that is helping one another. It has been proven in studies about the effectiveness of mandated programs versus voluntary and the results are always in favor of people that want the help, versus somebody else telling them they have to participate. Safe Families is completely voluntary on both families' parts. So you have two families that are wanting the same thing...to help that family in need to get on their feet. Whatever is causing those parents not to have the ability to care for their children at the moment, will allow the time necessary for them to get it figured out. It really is a social worker dream, in my opinion, to have such a program. I am honored to be a small part of getting Safe Families started in Wisconsin. Having this program is critical. Families should be able to have resources and help available, without having to turn control over to the welfare system. I am sure there is enough data available to also see the financial benefits this would have on our welfare system, as well. With all of the recent talks of budget cuts, this would be a perfect time and way to cut expenses, by supporting Safe Families to begin serving.

Thank you so much for your time and consideration. Respectfully submitted,

Bridget Sullivan

W53 N741 Eton Ct

Cedarburg, WI 53012

## Assembly Bill 30

### Testimony by Dr. David Anderson, Founder of Safe Families for Children

April 6, 2011

Dear Chairman Pridemore and Committee Members

My name is Dr. David Anderson. I am a psychologist and founder of Safe Families for Children. It is an honor to be here today. Safe Families is a movement of volunteer families who open their homes to care for children of a parent who is going through a difficult time. I started Safe Families in Chicago seven years ago. Safe Families has become a movement of compassion that has spread to more than 20 major cities throughout the US.

We all know that parenting can be a difficult job, even for those with strong support networks and good parenting skills. All parents are vulnerable to unexpected crises (loss, illness, unemployment, etc.) or situations (deployment) that can impact their ability to care for their children. When such situations occur, parents usually turn to family members to help out by taking their children. However, our society is quite mobile which has resulted in extended family often not in close proximity. As a result, parents may need to seek the assistance of a neighbor or close friend in order for their children to remain near them or to maintain some stability in their lives by not changing schools. Assembly Bill 30 simply empowers a parent to identify a non-relative person to care for their children during times of crisis.

The economic struggles of the past few years have added significant strain to families who were already marginally functioning. Substance abuse, loss of job, homelessness, and domestic violence often compound these pressures. If extended family is present, they can be turned to for support, respite, and restoration. However, many struggling families do not have extended family in close proximity. If they do, many are struggling themselves and are not in a position to help. Research has shown that these stressful experiences without adequate support can lead to incidents of child abuse and neglect. Child abuse not only has lifelong consequences for the victim, but it can also be a costly social problem for county and state governments.

This is why I started Safe Families seven years ago. Many parents were struggling to care for their children and needed help. Child welfare agencies are required by law to intervene only after abuse has occurred. Even if child welfare services were provided prior to abuse, most parents would probably prefer help offered from a caring neighbor rather than a state child welfare agency. Without help, many parents are headed in a downward spiral. We found that if a place can be provided for the child while a parent is freed to address the issues that led to the crisis, the child is safe and the family is restored.

There are thousands of families throughout the state who are struggling to care for their children because they lack supportive relationships. That's where Safe Families comes in. Safe Families is a network of host families who voluntarily open their homes to children of parents going through a difficult time. Host families are screened and approved similar to foster care (background checks and a home assessment). We would love for Safe Families to start in Wisconsin but we've been hampered by

previous legislation that restricts a parent from making these decisions. AB 30 would allow parents to make alternative care plans for their children.

In Chicago, for example, we have 715 host families taking in children while covering all the expense of caring for the children themselves. Last year, these host families provided 900 of these arrangements for children. Parents request help because they lost their job, home foreclosed, need to go to the hospital, or are interested in addressing issues such as substance abuse or domestic violence. All lack family to help them. The average stay was 40 days but could be as long or short as the parent wants. Nearly all children return to their parents. The Illinois DCFS director reported that we have helped the state save millions of dollars simply by these volunteers and neighbors helping one another. If the community can help these struggling families by creating this safety net for children in vulnerable situations, state intervention often is not needed.

Your approval of AB 30 would help us build this network of caring families who are willing to support isolated parents by caring for their children. This bill gives parents the authority to assign someone to care for their children while they are not able to. Thank you.

Sincerely,

David Anderson

*Dr. David Anderson is a Clinical Psychologist, Founder of Safe Families for Children and Executive Director of Lydia Home Association. He was elected as an Ashoka Fellow (a network of global Social Entrepreneurs) and a Prime Mover/ Hunt Alternatives Fund (national social movement leader). Safe Families received the 2010 National Peter Drucker Award for Nonprofit Innovation.*

# Assembly Hearing Slip

(Please print plainly)

Date: 4-6-2011

Bill No. AB 30

Or  
Subject \_\_\_\_\_

Rev. Dietrich Gryn  
Name

518 Walnut Grove Drive  
Street Address or Route Number (optional)

Madison, WI 53717  
City and ZIP Code

Representing \_\_\_\_\_

Speaking in favor: ☐

Speaking against: ☐

Registering in favor: ☒

Registering against: ☐

Speaking for information only  
(neither for nor against): ☐

***Please promptly return this slip to the  
messenger at the hearing.***

Provided by:  
Assembly Sergeant at Arms  
411 West, State Capitol  
Madison, WI 53708



**To:** Rep.Pridemore; Rep.Krug; Rep.Kestell; Rep.WilliamsM; Rep.Thiesfeldt; Rep.Berceau; Rep.Seidel;  
Rep.Pope-Roberts

**Subject:** [Possible SPAM] I support AB30, and here's why

**Importance:** Low

Dear representatives in the WI Assembly,

**I wish to speak in favor of AB30. This law**—which would permit a parent, guardian, or legal custodian of a child, by a properly executed power of attorney, to delegate to another person, for a period not to exceed one year, any of his or her powers regarding the care and custody of the child, except as outlined therein—**will address the gap that I see in our well-meaning child welfare system. If left unaddressed, by failure to pass AB30, this gap will only widen into a HUGE problem.**

Here's the problem: By law and policy most state child welfare agencies are allowed to rescue only children who have suffered blatant abuse or neglect, leaving thousands of children and their families in difficult situations. With the changing economy, many more families are experiencing financial crisis, unemployment, and homelessness. Others are dealing with family violence, parental drug and/or alcohol use, illness or incarceration. During such crises, many parents are not capable of providing a safe and caring environment for their children.

Historically, the extended family often stepped in to support parents by taking care of children for short periods of time, and neighbors came alongside families in crisis. However, many urban families are socially isolated and their extended family is non-existent or not available. The children in a family traumatized by crisis become especially at risk for neglect or abuse as their parents struggle to cope with crushing circumstances and emotions. Without assistance, many of these situations will lead to abuse/neglect episodes with long-lasting consequences for the child.

**Bill AB30, should it become law, will help prevent child abuse and neglect and it will alleviate a greatly overloaded foster care system. By passing this proposed law, you will join hundreds of others like me (I currently serve as Parish Associate at Dale Heights Presbyterian Church for Outreach and Mission) who represent communities of faith that want to provide appropriately screened, trained, authorized, and supervised "safe families" for temporary placement of children as an alternative and assist to this child welfare system. We need this law to authorize Wisconsin parents under duress to do just that by allowing them to legally sign over their children for temporary placement until they become stabilized, healthy and in a good place to reclaim their kids.**

**Thank you for voting in favor of AB30.**

Sincerely,

Rev. Dietrich Gruen  
518 Walnut Grove Drive  
Madison, WI 53717  
Ph: 608-833-2484  
[dgruen@chorus.net](mailto:dgruen@chorus.net)

4/5/2011 \*

# Assembly Hearing Slip

(Please print plainly)

Date: 4-6-2011

Bill No. AB 30

Or  
Subject \_\_\_\_\_

Fred Schmitt  
Name

752 East Netherwood St.  
Street Address or Route Number (optional)

Oregon, WI 53375  
City and ZIP Code

Representing \_\_\_\_\_

Speaking in favor: ☐

Speaking against: ☐

Registering in favor: ☒

Registering against: ☐

Speaking for information only  
(neither for nor against): ☐

***Please promptly return this slip to the  
messenger at the hearing.***

Provided by:  
Assembly Sergeant at Arms  
411 West, State Capitol  
Madison, WI 53708

**To:** Rep.Pridemore; Rep.Krug; Rep.Kestell; Rep.WilliamsM; Rep.Thiesfeldt; Rep.Berceau;  
Rep.Seidel; Rep.Pope-Roberts  
**Subject:** [Possible SPAM] Assembly Bill 30

**Importance:** Low

Representatives,

Thank you for considering my email in support of AB30. I first met Harold Tack and Rob Rennix from Safe Families for Children last fall. I have been intrigued by their model of reaching out to families, and especially children, in need of some temporary help before their situational challenges progress to the point of requiring government intervention. My wife and I have been married for nearly 20 years and have four children between the ages of 10 and 15. We have considered adoption and even foster care as a way to reach out to orphans and hurting children, but are even more excited to offer our very selves and our stable home environment through Safe Families.

I have been impressed to see my own family and several other Hillcrest families have a real passion to join with Safe Families to provide temporary help and a loving home to hurting children, with no personal financial gain and at zero expense to the county or state budgets. Personally, my family has been through the application and home study process, now waiting for our first placement. To that end, I urge you to support AB30 to allow the placement process of these children to begin. Thank you again for hearing my support of AB30.

Sincerely,

Fred Schmitt  
Associate Pastor  
Hillcrest Bible Church  
Oregon, WI

752 East Netherwood St.  
Oregon, WI 53575

# Assembly Hearing Slip

(Please print plainly)

Date: 4-6-2011

Bill No. AB 30

Or  
Subject \_\_\_\_\_

Joan Cable  
Name

1219 Lawton Lane  
Street Address or Route Number (optional)

Waukegan, WI 53547  
City and ZIP Code

Representing \_\_\_\_\_

Speaking in favor: ☐

Speaking against: ☐

Registering in favor: ☒

Registering against: ☐

Speaking for information only  
(neither for nor against): ☐

***Please promptly return this slip to the  
messenger at the hearing.***

Provided by:  
Assembly Sergeant at Arms  
411 West, State Capitol  
Madison, WI 53708

To: Rep.Pridemore

Subject: Support of Assembly Bill 30

Dear Committee on Children and Families,

I am writing to share my personal perspective and support of Assembly Bill 30 which will be reviewed on Wednesday, April 6 at 10:00 am.

I am a registered nurse with over 30 years of experience. Much of my professional career has focused upon working with families either through direct contact in the family practice clinic setting, or through my case management practice in working with children with special needs or chronic medical conditions. In addition to my professional practice, I also work with middle-school and high-school youth through my local church's youth program on a volunteer basis. Additionally, I have raised two children, with my husband, who are now in their mid-twenties.

Over the course of my 30 years of nursing practice, I have witnessed dramatic changes in families. Where there were once primarily nuclear families who were surrounded by extended families as their support systems, now there are many more single-parent households without extended family nearby for emotional and physical support in the child-rearing process. Our current young parents in their 20's or early 30's are much more likely to be single, and trying to maintain at least one job than they were ten to twenty years ago. They recently have had to endure increasing job stress to keep a job, or may have been without employment due to our recent and continuing economic situation. Due to their increasing economic stresses, they have been more likely to have had difficulty paying rent, providing nutritious meals for their families, and finding healthcare for themselves and their children. With the increased stress from their economic situation, and the increasing likelihood that they do not have a strong, positive support-system through either extended family or their local community, more children are put in situation where risk of abuse or neglect is quite high. Single parents also experience personal crises and may have nowhere to turn for short-term respite for caring for their children. Examples are as simple as an emergency hospitalization for an illness or injury, to as complex as physical abuse from a boyfriend requiring relocating to a shelter for abused women which does not allow children.

Wisconsin's current law forbids anyone who is not a blood relative to provide overnight care for a child. In that respect, we have all broken this statute when we have hosted sleep-overs for our children's friends, despite the permission of the biological parent(s) for their child to attend such activities.

Safe Families for Children provides an avenue for families with children who are in a crisis situation to voluntarily place their children with a fully-screened, fully-trained, volunteer host family. The biological family maintains full custody of their child whether the placement is for 1 day, or a year. The goal of the Safe Families program is to support both the child/children and to assist the biological parent in their struggles and to re-unite the

4/5/2011\*

family as soon as possible. In this process, there is oversight by local licensed social work staff as well as an established group of trained volunteers, many with professional backgrounds, such as myself, in working with families to work through their current problem situations. Safe Families is not just a "rescue", it also provides ongoing supportive relationships to the families in need, much like the extended families that are not as available as they were in years past.

I feel such a deep commitment to the Safe Families program and process, I have left my professional position at UW Health to work with them in launching and implementing the program in the Greater Madison Area. Speaking from experience, the need is here and it is growing daily. The need will not go away merely with improvement of economics because many of the basic supports of extended family are dwindling due to smaller families, increased physical distance between extended family members, more families headed by single parents, and increased stresses by our fast-paced, media based culture in the US.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this bill on Wednesday, April 6<sup>th</sup>. I look forward to being present for the presentations and discussions.

Sincerely,

Joan Cable, RN, BSN, CCM

1219 Lawton Lane

CC:

Waukegan, WI 53597

Representative Pridemore (Chair)

Representative Krug (Vice-Chair)

Representative Kestell

Representative Williams

Representative Thiesfeldt

Representative Berceau

Representative Seidel

Representative Pope-Roberts



# Safe Families for Children— Greater-Madison Area

Safe Families for Children -

Greater Madison Area

5763 County Highway Q

Waunakee, WI 53597

Phone: 608-658-5317

safefamilies.gma@gmail.com

www.safe-families.org

## Assembly Bill 30 Hearing – Committee on Children & Families

April 6, 2011

Rona Neri-Bergmann

Founding Advisory Board Member

Safe Families for Children – Greater Madison Area

Phone 608-850-3043

In spring of 2009, I was one of several local community members who formed a Task Force to study Safe Families with the hope of bringing this transformative program to the Madison area. We believe that the Safe Families model offers a unique response to the ever-increasing needs of families in distress. Initially, we had many questions and spent weeks researching Safe Families, talking with staff in Chicago and Rockford, to prepare for this new outreach. We soon learned that Safe Families has made a clear effort to create a program that can be easily duplicated and customized to fit each region. Their policies and procedures are clear and thorough, and their infrastructure of databases and web-based networks are already well established. Most impressive are the dramatically positive outcomes they have already shown in Illinois and other states - all with the power of volunteers and very low operational costs.

We transformed our Task Force into an Advisory Board in November 2009 and quickly got to work presenting the Safe Families concept to other faith communities. We also met several times with State and Dane County Human Services to share the Safe Families vision and to learn how we could best support and enhance the goals of Children, Youth and Family services in the Madison Area. Most recently, we have worked with DCYFS to make sure we are meeting or exceeding their expectations for thorough screening and background checks of our volunteers.

Since 2010, we have received start up funds from two area faith communities and two large, unsolicited anonymous donations - enough funding to hire staff and serve families for this year and beyond. To date, over forty faith communities from various parts of Madison and Dane County have expressed interest in supporting and potentially volunteering with Safe Families. As we grow we plan to serve families within a 50 mile radius around Madison.

Due to our inability to facilitate child placements under the current law, we have simultaneously turned our efforts to both advocating for this Safe Families bill and serving families immediately with a program called Family Friends. Through this mentoring program, screened and trained volunteers are paired with families in need before a placement is necessary. Family Friends can provide a wide variety of services such as tutoring, helping plan a family budget, teaching how to prepare nutritious kid-friendly meals, and most importantly just listening and being a friend to overwhelmed parents who may not have any other positive social supports. We have already completed our first volunteer orientation and have begun serving our first family in Waunakee. Twenty other Family Friend volunteers are waiting to be matched to a family in need.

We are very optimistic about this start, and Family Friends will continue to be an important part of Safe Families as we grow, but there is so much more we can do. There are families right now on the brink of homelessness, mothers who need to go to the hospital, and parents searching for work who just need someone to watch their children for a few days or a few weeks while they get back on their feet. And there are many caring people who would be happy to provide that temporary home - who would be transformed by the experience of truly helping their neighbors in a substantial, meaningful way. We already have twenty Host Safe Family volunteers here in the Madison area ready to reach out to families in need. Through Assembly Bill 30, you can be an important part of this opportunity to change lives for the better right here in Wisconsin by giving parents a safe and supportive legal option for child placement when facing a crisis. I urge you to vote to support Assembly Bill 30 in committee and when it comes to the floor for passage. Thank you for your time.

Chairman Pridemore and members of the committee,

I am here today to urge you to pass AB-30. I am a mom who sees the value of allowing parents the right to decide who can take care of their children.

Last summer, my husband and I heard about Safe Families and decided to become one. Little did I know that decision would lead to me directing Safe Families in Milwaukee. When we found out that Safe Families could not legally help families in the state of Wisconsin, I said, **"Then let's change the law!"** I wanted to change the law because I have seen families in need up close and personal in Milwaukee.

As the director of Safe Families Milwaukee, I have had the privilege of telling a few people about this idea of parents in crisis voluntarily allowing someone they trust to care for their children. Someone who would care for their children, and unlike anything else out there, also develop a relationship with that parent. No shame. No judgments. No threat of their children being taken away. Knowing that legally, we are not allowed to help parents do this right now, I have told few people. But, already the word is getting around and I receive phone calls weekly from parents in need of help. Most of the phone calls I get are from single moms who love their children and have suddenly found themselves homeless. They do not want to lose their children. They just need someone to care for those children while mom looks for a job and secures a place to live. Right now, I have to tell them to hang in there and wait.

I have talked with homeless coordinators at public schools, ministry leaders, homeless shelter operators and social workers and across the board the response is "We need you!" We have the opportunity to serve families who have not abused or neglected their children but simply need some help. An over-run and over-burdened system should not have to do this and Safe Families is a way for the faith community to come along side the welfare system and offer support.

The other end of the spectrum of my job is to recruit families willing to do something very unique and open up their home to a child without any compensation. You might think this would be difficult. It is not! I hosted one lunch at Elmbrook Church and had over 100 people show up. Since then, over 52 families have expressed interest in becoming a host family and currently 24 families have completed the process to become a certified host family. I have dozens of churches in the Milwaukee and Waukesha area who are just waiting for Safe Families to become legal because they are excited to introduce their congregations to this ministry opportunity. My goal is to recruit 500 host families within 5 years. Beyond the host families, we have multiple professionals willing to donate their services, tens of adults singing up to mentor the children, and small groups coming together to care for a parent in need.

In addition, I have been contacted by churches in the Appleton, Green Bay and Eau Claire who are anxious to start Safe Families in their area. The potential for neighbors helping neighbors across the entire state of Wisconsin is a reality. In Milwaukee, people are poised and ready to step up and contribute to the strengthening of families and communities. Right now, we can't do this even if we wanted to. Please pass AB30 and let us begin.

Traci Weldie, Safe Families – Milwaukee, Director

414-374-3490 / [www.safe-families.org/](http://www.safe-families.org/) [tweldie@gmail.com](mailto:tweldie@gmail.com)



Public hearing before the **Children and Families Assembly Committee**,  
Wednesday, April 6<sup>th</sup> @ 10 am Capital Building, Madison: Room 415 Northwest

Re: Testimony in favor of **Assembly Bill 30**

Good Morning, Mr. Chairman and subcommittee members,

Thank you for offering us an opportunity to speak on behalf of parents that need help, often on what seems to be during an emergency basis. The timing of our intervention is often crucial.

My name is Dave Stanfield and this is my wife, Sarah Stanfield. As a Host Safe Family, Sarah and I have been surprised at the number of times a single day can make a difference; sometimes even hours in the lives of others. We have served moms and dads that were at their "tipping point"; where their life circumstance was beginning to feel hopeless or where a parent simply did not have anyone to turn to in that moment of need. We have served families in many different ways, for example:

Our first placement with Safe Families was a situation where a mom had recently moved to our city to get away from gangs, drugs, and find a healthy lifestyle for herself and for her children. She was simply trying to start over. Shortly after moving, she needed to be admitted to the hospital but had no one to take care of her 3 children. Safe Families offered her an option of support and love at a point in her life where the only other option seemed to be the State child welfare system. Sarah and I picked up her children at the hospital and cared for them for a number of days while their mom was successfully treated and released. At a later date, we cared again for her small children for several days while she looked for job and childcare so she could use her education in the job market.

We served another mom who was terminally ill by caring for her 5 year old boy for a number a months until his father was able to get healthy enough to care for his son on his own. Recently, that father wrote us a letter thanking us for the impact we've had in his son's life, as well as in his own life.

A third placement involved a young mother who, in a moment of desperation, turned to Safe Families to care for her infant child because she was at a tipping point in her life. She had no support from her family, no job, and a baby's father that had just walked away from her and little Christiana. Her situation felt hopeless to her. In this case, she went first to the local DCF services where she spoke with a caseworker who counseled her against putting her baby "into the system" and instead suggested that she try a cooling-off period by putting her baby into the

hands of Safe Families. After only a short time, this mother's family rallied with her and provided the support she needed to care for her own child. We merely provided some breathing space for her and for her family to make a powerful decision, one that will most likely affect little Christiana for the rest of her life.

In each case, we were also able to minister to the needs of the parents with support and guidance. We've found that in most circumstances, a mom or dad just needs a "hand-up, not a hand-out" and to know that someone cares what happens to them. By providing care for their children in a moment of family crisis with a network of support for the parents, we can remove the lid on this pressure cooker and help the parents solve their own problems, without placing children into a complicated system of child welfare unnecessarily.

In each of the placements, we have responded when time was of the essence. Something was happening in each parent's life that prompted the parent to make a very difficult decision about their most precious possession, their children. It is for this reason that we urge you to pass AB30. Thank you.

Respectfully submitted by,

Dave & Sarah Stanfield

Host Safe Family in greater-Rockford Area/ Safe families for Children

C.C. Representative Pridemore (Chair),

Representative Krug (Vice-Chair),

Representative Kestell,

Representative Williams,

Representative Thiesfeldt,

Representative Berceau,

Representative Seidel ,

Representative Pope-Roberts.